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Weed and Seed cleans up downtown

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February 13, 2008

Last September, Lafayette received a five-year, \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice aimed at crime reduction and prevention and community rehabilitation.

Called Weed and Seed, the program so far has allowed police to increase patrols in higher-crime neighborhoods. It also helped offenders recently released from prison better transition into the community through Re-entry Court.

Lafayette resident Adam Murphy, who has prior experience working with Habitat for Humanity, was brought on in January as the city's Weed and Seed coordinator to help with neighborhood revitalization.

The part-time 20-hour position pays \$10 an hour from Weed and Seed grant money and funds from the Re-entry housing grant.

Mayor Tony Roswarski said he plans to make it a full-time position, which would be paid half by the city and half by the Lafayette Urban Enterprise Association.

Here, Murphy, talks about Weed and Seed efforts and what is to come in the next few years.

Question: How much grant money has Lafayette received so far? When is the next reimbursement?

Answer: Thus far, Lafayette has been awarded \$516,000 in grants connected to the downtown Lafayette Weed and Seed community initiative. The Department of Justice awarded \$175,000 for the first year of Weed and Seed start-up programs, and \$85,000 to implement a new problem-solving court for high-risk offenders.

The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority awarded \$256,000, which was recently announced, for rental assistance for those participating in the Re-entry Court. No date has been set, but we expect to receive an additional round of funding later this year.

Q: How is the Weed and Seed grant being used?

A: In addition to the Re-entry Court, grant funds are being used for "weeding" activities, such as the Lafayette Police Department's Street Crimes Unit, targeting drug-dealing hot spots in the city.

Trinity United Methodist Church, on the "seeding" side, is preparing to recruit volunteers to bring a very successful program called Families and Schools Together into Miller Elementary School this month.

Q: What has been accomplished so far?

A: In the first three months of Weed and Seed, we've been able to increase community policing, especially foot patrols, in targeted areas and place enforcement resources where they are needed most.

Also a wide array of resources and partnerships have started to be woven together to increase public safety and address the factors of committed crimes. Local officers are engaged at the neighborhood-level in growing ways.

Q: What types of partnerships is the Weed and Seed steering committee pursuing right now?

A: A motivated group of local business chief executive officers, encouraged by Gary Lehman of Fairfield Manufacturing, have begun putting together linkages for Re-entry Court participants to be matched with training and jobs. Ivy Tech Community College, one of the key partners, has initiated a dental care program and a special class to help the disadvantaged develop job skills and higher education opportunities.

Lafayette's neighborhoods have embraced Weed and Seed and are looking at ways to become involved. JoAnn Miller, Judge Don Johnson and local government representatives have been attending neighborhood meetings to discuss and explore neighborhood "seeding" activities, such as neighborhood watch programs among others.

The Lafayette Hearing Authority continues to play an important role in neighborhood revitalization targeting problem properties for rehabilitation or demolition.

Q: Why was the Weed and Seed program sought for Lafayette? Why now?

A: The Weed and Seed approach is important to build community in the downtown area. Our city has a wealth of resources that can be directed toward stabilizing neighborhoods and increasing public safety.

As a result, the quality of life can be improved for all residents in the Greater Lafayette community. Weed and Seed is all about building partnerships to solve problems for the long run.